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LETTER DATED 6 JULY 1999 FROM THE CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you the press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea on 5 July 1999, which reaffirms Eritrea's commitment to the Framework Agreement of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Tesfa Alem SEYOUM
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

* Reissued for technical reasons.

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Annex

Press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on 5 July 1999

Eritrea remains committed to the OAU Framework Agreement

In the past year or so, Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) propaganda has been hinged on one ploy: repeat any falsehood ad nauseam in the hope that sheer repetition will confuse public opinion.

This is why the TPLF continues to falsely claim that the "OAU Framework Agreement calls for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from all the Ethiopian territories that they have occupied since May 6, 1998, and for the full restoration of the Ethiopian civil administration of those areas".

In the first place, it is Ethiopia which continues to occupy sovereign Eritrean territory. As a matter of fact, it is Ethiopia which unilaterally redrew the established boundary between the two countries to incorporate large tracts of sovereign Eritrean territory into its illegal map of 19 October 1997. Indeed, it is now clear in retrospect that Ethiopia's acts of aggression in the Bada and Badme areas in July 1997, and the Burie areas in January 1998, were motivated by the desire to create facts on the ground so as to put under its control, albeit in a piecemeal manner, the Eritrean territories that it had incorporated into its illicit map. This was why Eritrea emphatically insisted for an investigation of all the incidents prior to 6 May 1998; inserted now as operative paragraph 7 of the Framework Agreement.

Secondly, there is no ambiguity in the 11-point OAU Framework, whose main contents include the following five, sequential, measures:

- Formal acceptance of the Framework Agreement by both sides;
- Formal cessation of hostilities;
- Eritrean forces to redeploy from Badme and environs as a mark of goodwill and consideration to the OAU;
- The demilitarization of the entire border through the redeployment of the forces of both parties along the entire border as part of the implementation process of the Framework Agreement;
- Demarcation of the boundary within a period of six months.

The OAU Framework, and the 41-page report of the secretariat, does not contain a single paragraph to support Ethiopia's new preconditions. The written clarifications that the OAU High-level Delegation provided to Eritrea on 26 January this year are clear. "Badme and environs" refers to Badme and the surrounding areas as the logic and meaning of the word imply. It does not, by any stretch of the imagination, mean Badme and any coveted area in the 1,300 km-long common boundary, as Ethiopia now claims unabashedly.

As the clarifications again underline, Ethiopia has all along refused to submit the totality of its claims, arguing that these will be submitted "when the issues of delimitation, demarcation and, if need be, arbitration are addressed". The OAU has not, thus, been in a position to determine the scope of the conflict and the extent of the "contested areas", if there are any, let along give a verdict on "occupied areas".

Finally, the TPLF regime is now alluding to private letters from the OAU Chairman to give legitimacy to its unacceptable preconditions. These letters - which have contradictory content - obviously cannot override the official clarifications that the OAU High-level Delegation provided to Eritrea on 26 January 1999.